

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



MEDIA ADVISORY

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Government Reform Committee Continues to Examine Drinking Water Safety in D.C.

*Are D.C. Residents Safer Than Before?
Is There A Larger National Problem?*

**What: Government Reform Committee Oversight Hearing:
“Getting the Lead Out: The Ongoing Quest for Safe Drinking Water
in the Nation's Capital”**

When: FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 2005, 10:00 A.M.

Where: ROOM 2154, RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

Background:

The purpose of this hearing is to learn the status of the District of Columbia's drinking water lead levels and inform the public whether remediation efforts have been effective. The Committee will also hopefully learn whether the D.C. lead situation is an isolated incident or indicative of a nation-wide problem.

The Committee will examine the events that have taken place since the Committee's last hearing on May 21, 2004, on lead contamination in the District water supply. The other basis for this hearing is to explore the validity and sufficiency of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) plan for actions involving modifications to the Lead and Copper Rule and EPA's guidance materials that was announced on March 7, 2005.

On March 5, 2004, the Committee held its first hearing on lead contamination in the District of Columbia water supply. We assessed the coordinated actions of the responsible government agencies with regard to the lead levels in the District water supply, and explored whether the EPA's Safe Drinking Water program was adequate to assure safe drinking water for the consuming public or whether it needs to be changed.

After the March 5 hearing, the Committee requested additional information from EPA, the Washington Aqueduct, and the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (WASA) regarding specific actions taken by each agency to combat the elevated lead levels in the District of Columbia water system. In addition, these agencies implemented a number of steps to address this situation, including supplying water filters to affected District residents; additional testing of residences, schools, and libraries; blood screening for affected children under six and pregnant and nursing women; and expanded public outreach.

The Committee held a second hearing on May 21, 2004, to assess the progress being made by EPA, the Washington Aqueduct, and WASA in combating the lead problem in the District and the sufficiency of steps being taken to address the problem: the remediation process, lead replacement, and changes to water treatment. We also addressed potential measures designed to assure that regulations governing lead content in the water supply and requirements for coordination among responsible governmental agencies were effective in ensuring the safety of drinking water in the District of Columbia and throughout the nation.

For its third hearing, the Committee intends to focus on the administrative actions taken by EPA Region III against WASA. This situation hit especially close to home here in the Capitol complex in December when EPA advised the Architect of the Capitol that potentially excessive lead levels could be found in restroom sinks and that people should be warned not to drink water from those sources. The Committee will examine what efforts have been taken to remedy the situation.

As a result of the elevated lead levels in the District of Columbia water supply, EPA undertook a nationwide review of the effectiveness of the Lead and Copper Rule in monitoring and evaluating the lead levels in the water systems throughout the country. On March 7, EPA announced preliminary results of its evaluation and initiated a plan for action. The Committee hopes to discern whether the current Safe Drinking Water program is adequate to assure safe drinking water for the consuming public across the nation, or whether additional measures are necessary to accomplish that objective.

WITNESSES

The Honorable Benjamin H. Grumbles, Acting Assistant Administrator, Environment Protection Agency Office of Water

Mr. Donald S. Welch, Regional Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency Region III

Mr. Thomas P. Jacobus, P.E., General Manager, Washington Aqueduct, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Mr. Jerry Johnson, General Manager, District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority

Mr. Stephen Estes-Smargiassi, Director of Planning, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, on behalf of the American Water Works Association

Erik D. Olson, Senior Attorney, Natural Resources Defense Council

James R. Elder, Independent Consultant

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